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1961/04/27

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, CANADA.

NUMBERED LETTER

TO: UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, OTTAWA, CANADA.

FROM: The Canadian Embassy, HAVANA, Cuba.

Reference: Our letters Nos. L-317 of April 21 and
L-324 of April 26, 1961.

Subject: Cuban Conflict - Military Implications.

Security: CONFIDENTIAL

No: L-325

Date: April 27, 1961.

Enclosures: Newspaper Clippings.

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References

Mr. Buttell
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X	To: Mr. Beauchene
MAY 3 1961	

Attached are some newspaper clippings containing pictures of the Cuban armed forces in action against the anti-Castro troops that invaded Cuba on April 17, 1961. Also attached is the untranslated text of Prime Minister Castro's accounting to the nation on April 23, which includes a detailed explanation of the order of battle and operations orders of both sides to the conflict. If this information is of sufficient interest to the military authorities in Ottawa, they may wish to have it translated.

2. Apparently the invading force included 1200-1400 well-armed men supported by artillery, mortars, anti-tank guns, demolition teams, and five Sherman tanks. After feigning attacks at Santa Fe, Baraceca and the Isle of Pines, they assaulted the Zapata Peninsula. Paratroops were dropped simultaneously to secure access to the Peninsula. The anti-Castro forces encountered immediate resistance and after the first day of fighting their beachhead had been contained by the Cuban Militia. During the next two days they were under incessant attack by the Cuban armed forces, using artillery, infantry, tanks and tactical air support. Within 72 hours the invasion had been completely defeated. According to casualty statistics released to date, the Castro Government forces suffered 87 killed and 250 wounded. The anti-Castro invaders had 82 killed and about 1000 captured. A very few of the invaders may have escaped into the Escambray Mountains, but the majority of those not captured or identified as dead probably perished when vessels of the invading fleet were sunk.

3. Prime Minister Castro said that on the day operations began the Cuban Air Force had ready for action only two jet fighters, two Sea Fury fighters, and two B-26 bombers, but "these were later augmented". He did not explain the latter phrase. However, at another point in his speech he said: "They said that we had MIG-17's. We have no MIG-17's. How I wish that on those days that we had had some MIG's here!"

4. The intelligence on the basis of which this anti-Castro invasion was planned appears to have been incredibly bad. Captured prisoners stated that a fundamental postulate of the operation was the expectation of anti-Castro uprisings

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throughout Cuba and the defection without a fight of a large proportion of the Cuban armed forces. In the event, morale in the Cuban forces was very high and the troops are reported to have fought with considerable skill and spirit. There were no signs of civilian insurrection and the arrest of some 50,000 Cubans, suspected of counter-revolutionary sympathies, probably forestalled any such action. Moreover, our understanding is that the counter-revolutionary groups inside Cuba had no knowledge of the invasion plans or dates.

5. The Castro Government's intelligence appears to have been as good as their opponents' was bad. It is hard to believe that such a convincing victory could have been achieved in so short a time unless the Cuban armed forces had been deployed to meet just such an amphibious attack. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Castro's account of the operations gives credit to good organization and determination rather than intelligence warning.

6. In the final analysis, the anti-Castro invasion was made at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and in the wrong manner. It was launched two days after the whole nation had been mobilized and alerted as a result of bombing attacks on Cuban Air Force bases. The assault landings were made in a swampy area where they could be quickly contained and systematically destroyed without room to manoeuvre. Finally, the invading force was far too small for anything but a purely local operation.

Armenian
The Embassy.